

## 2006 SESSION UPDATE AND ISSUES SURVEY



Senator

# Luke Esser

48th District

Jan./Feb. 2006

**Survey Enclosed**

### A New Year – A New Opportunity for Fiscally Responsible Government

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I hope that the New Year is proving to be happy, safe and productive for you and your family. The 2006 session of the Washington State Legislature has now begun, and I am optimistic that we can work together in a bipartisan fashion to avoid the many tax and budgeting mistakes that were made last year.

In 2005 the majority passed a half-billion dollars in tax increases, failed to fund important pension liabilities for police officers, firefighters, school teachers and other public employees, and adopted a totally partisan, unsustainable budget that spent \$600 million more than the state was projected to collect in tax revenues.

Worse yet, the majority gutted Initiative 601 (which provided spending limits and a rainy-day reserve fund), setting the stage for more tax increases in the future.

Thanks to the fiscally responsible no-new-taxes budget passed by the Legislature on a bipartisan basis in 2003, and thanks to the productivity of the private sector, we are now enjoying a \$1.45 billion surplus in state revenues. But we need to avoid the temptation to spend every penny, as unfortunately happened last year.

I believe that we should put government back on a budget by restoring the voter-approved spending limits and rainy-day fund, and by rescinding the tax increases of last year, especially the death tax (also known as the "estate tax").

There are many other important issues facing our state, and I am looking forward to working with other legislators to find common ground whenever possible this year.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you ever have any questions or comments about your state government. Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Senator Luke Esser

### Defending Our Children Against Dangerous Sex Offenders

The state of Florida recently passed legislation called "Jessica's Law," which provides tougher penalties for sex offenders who prey on children. During the first week of this year's legislative session a huge rally was held in Olympia in support of a proposal called "Jessica's Law Plus."

I support the Jessica's Law Plus proposal, which includes increasing the sentence for those who commit serious sex crimes against children to a minimum of 25 years, plus lifetime electronic monitoring (through ankle bracelets) after release from prison. We also need to toughen penalties against released sex offenders who falsely claim to be homeless in order to avoid registering their residence location with the county sheriff, as is required under current state law.

As state legislators we have a particular responsibility to protect our most vulnerable group of citizens – children – from the threat posed by violent sex offenders. To accomplish that goal, we need to pass tougher laws that close the gaps in current legislation and provide just punishment for those convicted of these heinous crimes.

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#### Senate leadership:

Minority Floor Leader

#### Senate committees:

Judiciary  
Transportation  
Rules



**Legislative Town  
Hall Meetings**  
**Saturday, February 18th**  
**See Back Panel For Details**

## Transportation – Let's Finish The Job

This legislative session is vital to providing our community with the opportunity to complete some of the most important transportation projects in our state – a new SR 520/Evergreen Point Floating Bridge, and the expansion of I-405.

The recent gas tax increase, which was approved by the Legislature and the voters last year, provided a start to funding these projects, but I believe our responsibility is to provide citizens with a blueprint that shows how we *finish* these projects.

Legislation already exists that allows King, Pierce and Snohomish Counties to propose a package of highway improvement projects and funding sources, and present that package to the voters for their approval or rejection.

Some believe that we should wait until next year, or the year after that, to come up with a plan to finish these critical projects which will improve safety and reduce congestion. I support moving ahead this year with a ballot measure that presents to the voters a balanced package of highway improvements and transit investments. We need to move beyond the “highways vs. transit” debates of the past. We need to *finish* the job.

### 520 Bridge

One of my biggest priorities is securing funding for the construction of a new 520 bridge across Lake Washington. Right now, the 42-year-old span is vulnerable to everything from windstorms to earthquakes. It absolutely needs to be replaced.

It will cost in the neighborhood of \$3 billion to replace the 520 bridge. The gas tax passed last year provides a half-billion dollars for the bridge. This is a lot of money, but not nearly enough to finish the job. More and more people are using the 520 bridge every day, and it would be an absolute disaster for our economy if the existing bridge were to sink before a replacement is built.

### I-405

I-405 is the north-south lifeline of the Eastside, connecting all the major employment centers and cities. There simply is no alternative for commuters and for businesses that need to travel between Bothell and Renton. A series of improvements throughout the I-405 corridor has begun, but will cost roughly another \$2 billion to complete.

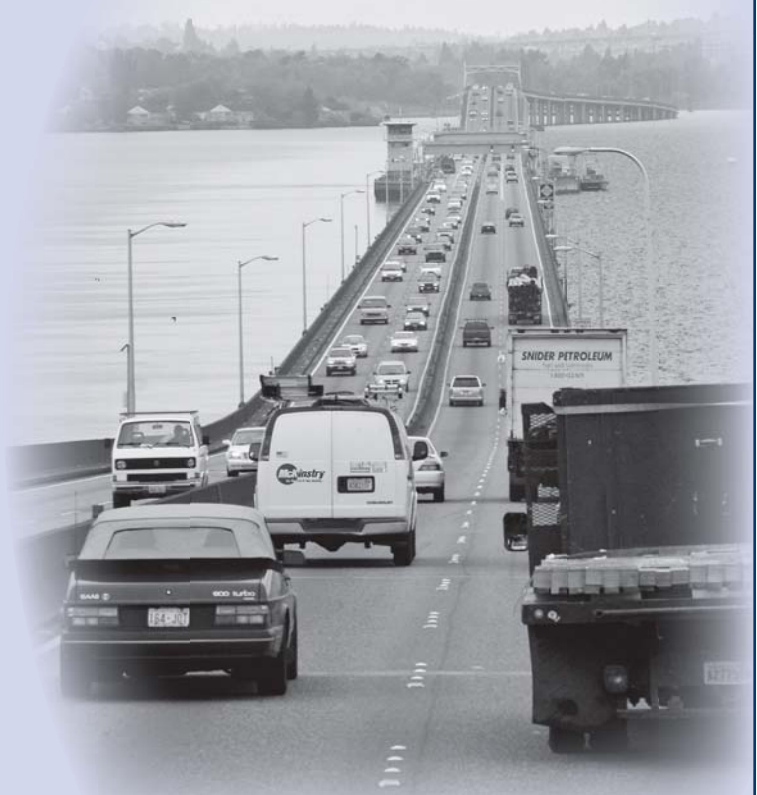
We can, and should, build the new 520 bridge and the new improvements along I-405 in an environmentally-sensitive way that provides the least amount of disruption

to neighboring communities. Doing nothing would be bad planning, bad for our economy and bad for our quality of life.

### We Need To Act This Year

I continue to oppose plans to reduce congestion by imposing tolls that are so high that they force low- and middle-income drivers off the highways. I believe we need a combination of highway and transit improvements that will reduce congestion and increase mobility for all, regardless of income level.

Our local economy on the Eastside is starting to accelerate, and I believe that with the completion of appropriate transportation infrastructure we can set up our region for an era of unprecedented prosperity.



## Achieving Excellence in Education

We have strong schools in the Bellevue, Lake Washington and Issaquah School Districts, and some of the brightest students in the state. Today, a number of efforts are underway to help all of Washington's students meet the standards measured by the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL).

In 2004, retakes of the WASL were authorized. A student may now retake all or any portion of the WASL up to four times during his or her junior and senior years.

The Legislature also authorized the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to develop alternatives to the WASL for students who have twice failed all WASL subjects. These alternatives must be equal in rigor and must accurately measure required skills, but should provide an option for students who simply are not good at taking tests.

I do not believe, as some have suggested, that we should eliminate the requirement that students must pass the 10th grade WASL in order to graduate from high school. Frankly, I believe we would be doing students a disservice by lowering academic standards.



Instead, we need to do more to give struggling students a better chance to pass the WASL by offering remedial classes, tutors and expanded summer school programs.

Our challenge is to educate Washington's children to out-compete the world in business, academic and technical fields. The world has changed, and so must our educational system.

## Protecting Our Environment

**Limiting the importation of nuclear waste** – A voter-approved initiative from 2004 (I-297) limits the importation of radioactive waste into Hanford. Shortly after the initiative passed with the largest number of “yes” votes in state history, a lawsuit was filed to overturn the new law. I support a bill drafted by those who proposed I-297 which would make technical changes to the initiative to make it likelier to withstand the court challenge. That bill passed the Senate last year, but failed to pass the State House of Representatives.

**Market-based incentives to reduce electronic waste** – Electronic waste is the fastest-growing segment of garbage in the U.S. In our state alone, about 1.7 million computers, monitors and televisions are taken out of service every year. These wastes contain lead, mercury and other toxic chemicals. To address this issue, I am supporting an electronic-waste recycling program negotiated with the private-sector retailers of the state.

Fortunately, the electronic-waste recycling program avoids creating a new government bureaucracy. The program serves as a market-based incentive for manufacturers to reduce the use of toxic chemicals. Recycling programs would be tailored to local communities, and could be operated by some combination of manufacturers, retailers and local governments.

**Reducing dependence on foreign oil** – I support an incentive-based plan to encourage the production and use of biodiesel, which is a combination of diesel and oil-seed crops such as canola. Biodiesel will help reduce Washington's dependence on foreign oil and also provide a new market for Washington crops. By encouraging a successful new biodiesel industry in our state, we will be providing new opportunities for businesses and farmers, and reducing our nation's dependence on foreign oil.



## Senator Luke Esser • 48th Legislative District

416 Legislative Building, PO Box 40448, Olympia, WA 98504-0448

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# Senator Esser's Town Hall Meetings

TOWN HALL MEETINGS ON SATURDAY FEBRUARY 18TH



The 2006 session of the Washington State Legislature began at noon on January 9th and is scheduled to end on March 9th.

To be an effective legislator this session, I need to hear from you, my constituents. That's why I'm hosting a series of town hall meetings to answer your questions and listen to your concerns. I hope you can join us.

**JOIN  
US!**

### Bellevue Town Hall Meeting

**Place:** Bellevue Family YMCA  
14230 Bel-Red Road  
Bellevue, WA 98007

**Date:** Saturday, February 18th  
10 a.m. to Noon

**Guests:** Grant Degginger,  
Mayor of Bellevue or  
John Chelminiak,  
Deputy Mayor of Bellevue

### Redmond Town Hall Meeting

**Place:** Redmond Regional Library  
15990 N.E. 85th St.  
Redmond, WA 98052

**Date:** Saturday, February 18th  
2 p.m. to 4 p.m.

**Guest:** Kathy Lambert,  
King County Councilmember





# 48th District 2006 Session Survey

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## BUDGET AND TAXES

1. Which of the following issues do you think are most important for the Legislature to address?

(Please rank according to importance to you, with "1" being the most important, "2" being the next important, and so on.)

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# 48th District 2006 Session Survey

7. Because of the high cost of living in the greater Seattle area, many school districts say they have a hard time recruiting and retaining teachers. Do you favor having teachers receive an extra housing allowance if they live in areas where housing costs are higher than average?

VOTER 1 | VOTER 2  
☐ ☐ a. Yes  
☐ ☐ b. No

8. Do you agree or disagree with the statement, "More remediation (such as tutoring, after-school or summer programs) needs to be available for students with difficulties passing all or some part of the WASL."?

VOTER 1 | VOTER 2  
☐ ☐ a. Agree  
☐ ☐ b. Disagree

## TRANSPORTATION

9. Should the voters be presented with a plan to finish the large transportation projects of our region in November of 2006, or should we wait until later years?

VOTER 1 | VOTER 2  
☐ ☐ a. Present the voters with a plan this year  
☐ ☐ b. Wait until later years

10. Do you support the use of tolls as a means to make using state highways expensive enough to deter some drivers from using their preferred route?

VOTER 1 | VOTER 2  
☐ ☐ a. Yes  
☐ ☐ b. No

Please write your other comments here:

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If you would like to receive legislative updates via e-mail, please provide your name, phone number, e-mail address and street address here:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ If you would like to receive a copy of the results of this survey, please mark this box:



Senator Luke Esser  
PO Box 40448  
Olympia, WA 98504-0448

2006 LEGISLATIVE  
SURVEY

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First Class  
Postage  
Required